IX--FIRST SHERIFF, BANKER AND OTHERS

SHERIFF ROBERTSON, Walter Scott

Edmonton's Sheriff, who is also one of the veritable old-timers of the district, was born in St. John, N.B., in 1841, and is a grand-nephew of Hon. John Robertson, at one time a leading shipbuilder and politician in that province. As now in Ontario the young man hears of great opportunities in Western Canada, so in those days young men in New Brunswick listened to fine tales of great opportunities in the newer Ontario.

This is why in 1855 Sheriff Robertson's father decided to week his fortunes in Ontario. As there was no Intercolonial Railway in those days Mr. Robertson and his family went around by boat to Boston and then by the New York Central to Niagara, and on to Brantford. Sheriff Robertson later lived at Ingersoll and finally in Seaforth. It was while here he was married. He remained at Seaforth until 1882, though for four years previous to that he had been going up to Winnipeg trading.

His cousin, Alex. Macdonald, of the A. Macdonald Company, who had come out with the Wolseley expedition and had already established trading-posts at Battleford and Edmonton, invited Mr. Robertson to accompany him on a trip of inspection to these posts. The latter did, hoping to have some buffalo-hunting, although in this he was disappointed. They went by train to Brandon and then overland by sleighs to Fort Saskatchewan.

For a time Mr. Robertson had an idea of returning by

by Montana to see that country, but the Saskatchewan valley took such a grip upon him, he says, that he made up his mind to bring his family out and settle here.

"I felt that for dairying it would be the greatest country on the continent," says Sheriff Robertson, "and that with the railroads there would be great development. Besides that there was, and is, something in the climate or the country that makes men more daring than in the East. They are not afraid to take chances here."

When Mr. Robertson returned to settle in Edmonton he found here Frank Oliver's store and printing office, John Brown's store, Matthew MacAuley's livery, John McDougall's store, John Cameron's store (for A. Macdonald & Co.) and Norris and Carey's store on the St. Albert trail where the Catholic mission now is. These were the principal places of business.

At that time there was only one Sheriff in the Territories, Chapleau of Regina, a brother of the statesman Chapleau. Mr. Robertson was appointed Deputy-Sheriff for this district shortly after his coming here, and as the duties of his office were not very onerous then he continued a little farming as well, south of Edmonton, his family making their home in the town the greater part of the year.

"The duties of a sheriff at Edmonton in those days were not heavy," the Sheriff says, "in fact one day's work in the Sheriff's office now exceeds the work of a whole twelve-month twenty-five years ago. But sometimes I had

to take long tramps to make a seizure of furs for debt, as furs constituted practically the only currency of the time."

In 1885 the Sheriff had to make a seizure at Beaver Lake upon the goods of one Major Butler (supposed to be a cousin of the author of The Great Lone Land). He had been living in splendid style, for the west in those days, and outran his means. However, before the Sheriff made the seizure the Major had cached all his valuables in leather trunks buried in the cellar for fear the restless Indians might pillage his place. He and his family were brought to Edmonton for protection like many others by the Mounted Police, and in his absence the Indians about Beaver Lake forced an entrance to the house, cut up the carpets for saddle-cloths, scattered letters and photos about, but went away without finding the cache in the cellar.

This was brought into town by the Sheriff and assistants and sold here, the saddles, guns, silver and china bringing good prices then at auction, for money was plentiful after the rebellion.

In those days the court was only held here every six months, Judge Richardson and Judge Rouleau coming up from Battleford to hold the court. The sessions of the court were somewhat informal and few cases came up for trial.

During the rebellion there were four families who never left the town to seek protection at the Fort or at the Mission in St. Albert. These were the Olivers,

Robertsons, Camerons and McCauleys. The Hudson Bay house was fortified with sacks of flour, piled up inside the walls to stop bullets, and up in the town the "Home Guard" was organized to take turns in watching during the night. This guard was kept up here from the time of the Frog Lake massacre until the troops came in.

The arrival of the troops was an event in Edmonton's istory and a profitable one, as the Sheriff recalls it, for they brought provisions of all kinds during their stay, and had big scows built for their transport down the river. They came in May and left in June.

The next stir in Edmonton's round of frontier life was the "Land Office Grab," so often narrated, and then came the Klondyke rush in 1898 which meant the real awakening of modern life here. The attention of the continent was drawn to Edmonton, while in addition to this the parties who came spent a great deal of money here in outfitting. Likewise they got into trouble among themselves and there were many lawsuits, so even the lawyers profited by the rush.

From this time on Edmonton's progress has been rapid, and its history so fresh in men's minds that the Sheriff's reminiscences ended there with a hearty laugh at the Klondykers baled hay, their massive picks, and wonderful vehicles vainly intended for transportation purposes.